Hoshi Mamoru Inu ★ Takashi Murakami

星守る犬

村上たかし

双葉社

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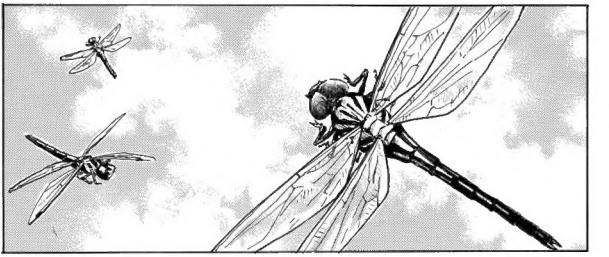
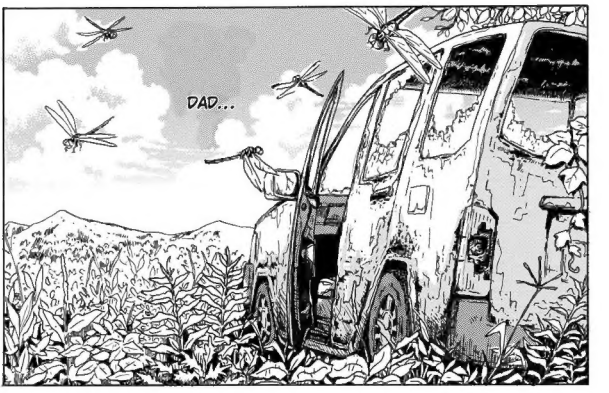
STAR PROTECTOR DOG★

TAKASHI MURAKAMI

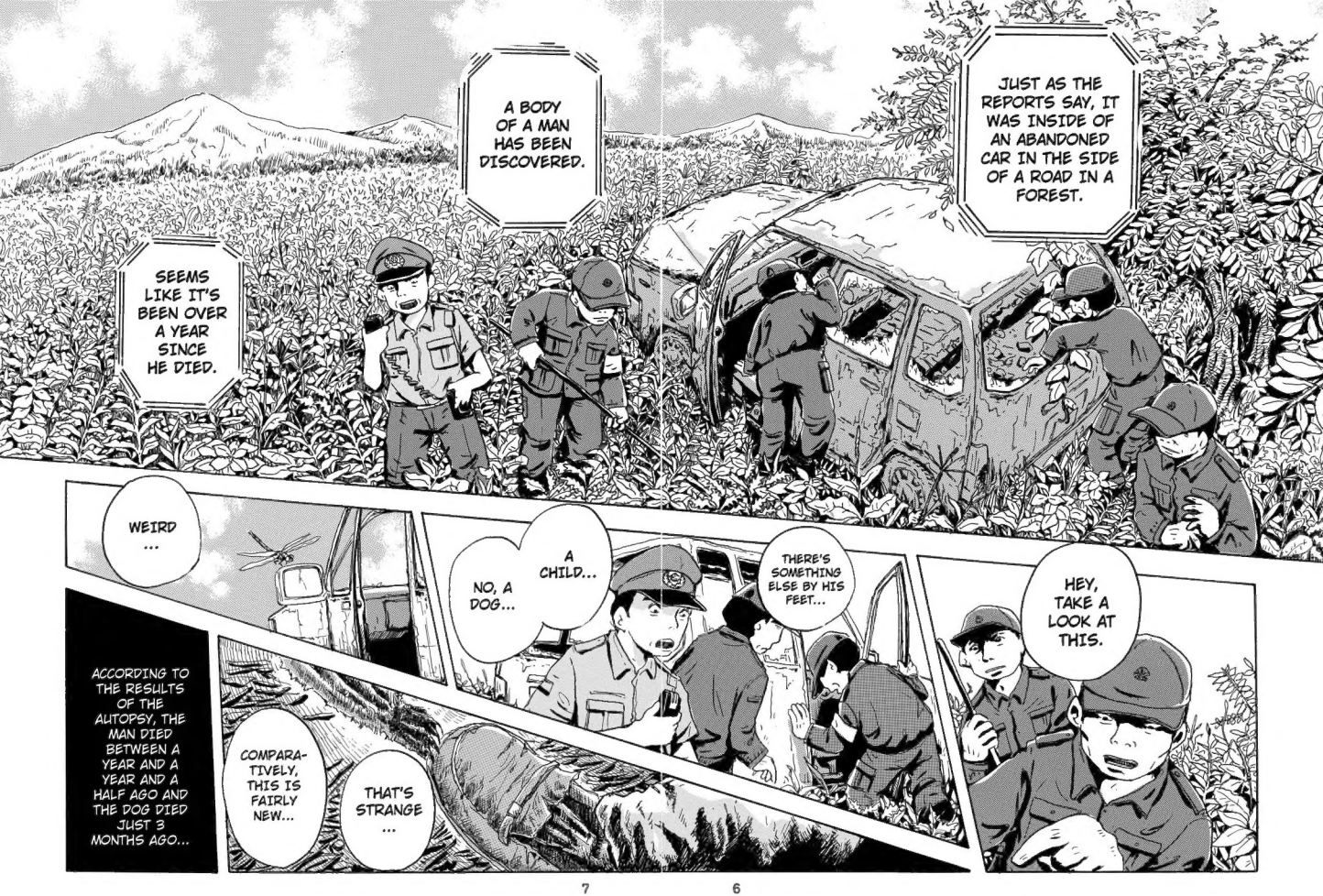
STAR PROTECTOR DOG

DEFINITION: USED TO DESCRIBE A PERSON WHO DESIRES SOMETHING THAT WILL NEVER BE WITHIN THEIR REACH; THIS COMES FROM THE IMAGE OF A DOG STARING AT A STAR AS IF IT WANTS IT.




DAD...

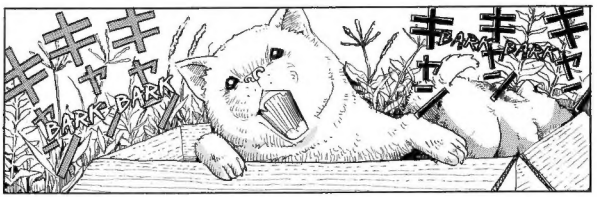
FOUND IT!
THIS WAY!
DAD, LET'S GO
FOR A WALK.


A BODY OF A MAN HAS BEEN DISCOVERED.
JUST AS THE REPORTS SAY, IT WAS INSIDE OF AN ABANDONED CAR IN THE SIDE OF A ROAD IN A FOREST.
SEEMS LIKE IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR SINCE HE DIED.
WEIRD ...
A CHILD... NO, A DOG...
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE BY HIS FEET...
HEY, TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.
ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF THE AUTOPSY, THE MAN DIED BETWEEN A YEAR AND A YEAR AND A HALF AGO AND THE DOG DIED JUST 3 MONTHS AGO...
COMPARA-TIVELY, THIS IS FAIRLY NEW...
THAT'S STRANGE ...

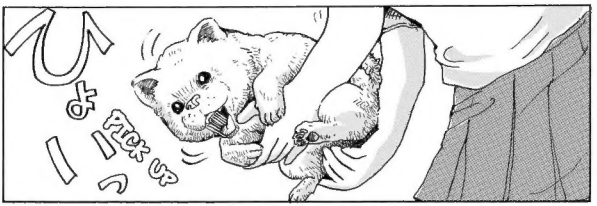
星守る犬

ほしまもるいぬ

STAR PROTECTOR DOG



MY FIRST MEMORY WAS BARKING INSIDE THE BOX.



A LIVELY LITTLE GIRL
PICKED ME UP,
AND LAUGHED AS SHE RAN WITH ME IN HER ARMS.
SPRING
I'M HOME!
IT WAS WARM, AND SMELLED NICE.
SHIVER
SHE BRUSHED ME,
AND WRAPPED ME IN SOMETHING.
THE MILK WAS SWEET,
MOM, PLEASE!
ASK YOUR FATHER FIRST.
AND I BECAME SLEEPY.
OKAY, YOU STAY IN HERE FOR TONIGHT.

I WONDER IF I'LL BE ABLE TO STAY HERE FOREVER...
IT WOULD BE NICE...
HEY, DEAR, WHERE'S THE TOWEL?
ISN'T IT IN THE LARGEST DRAWER?
PULL
ガラ
SURPRISE
キャウン
WHOA!
I WAS SURPRISED,
BITE
カプ
AHH!!!
AND THE FIRST TIME I MET DAD, I BIT HIM.

GOOD THING IT WAS ME!
A NORMAL PERSON WOULD HAVE THROWN YOU OUT.
GEEZ, YOU CAUSED ME A MAJOR INJURY!
AND ALLOWED THEM TO KEEP YOU.
SO I ENDURED IT,
I CARE ABOUT MY FAMILY MEMBERS' OPINIONS.
"YES, DAD!"
YOU'D BETTER BE THANKFUL FOR ME.
AND ON TOP OF ALL THAT, I'M HERE, TAKING YOU OUT ON A WALK...

THOUGH SHE'S STILL A KID, SHE THOUGHT HARD IN PICKING A NAME FOR ME.
IT'S ENGLISH.
"HAPPY"!
I THOUGHT UP A NAME FOR YOU.
THE LITTLE GIRL'S NAME IS MIKU-CHAN.
OCCA-SIONALLY PLAYED WITH ME,
ボスン ボスン!
BAM BAM
HAHA HAHA
HAPPY!
HERE I GO!
MIKU-CHAN
IT'S A BISCUIT!
HAHA HAHA!
BARK!
AND OCCASIONALLY PUT REALLY DELICIOUS THINGS INTO MY MOUTH.
EAT
ぴよ
PEACH
Dog Food
カリカリ
PLACE

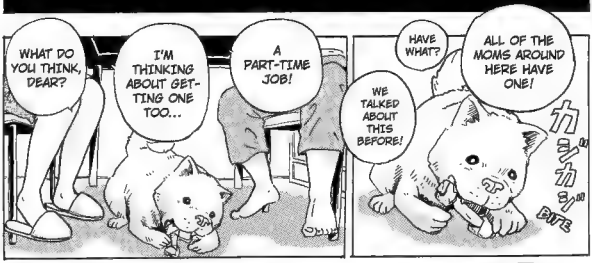
I TOLD YOU NOT TO BITE THAT!
NO, HAPPY!
カジカジ
BITE
WAS MOM.
THE PERSON WHO ALWAYS FED ME
Dog's
BUT I WISH SHE'D STOP SLAPPING MY HIPS INSTEAD OF MY BUTT.
GEEZ!
SLAP
SHE SPANKED ME WHENEVER I DID SOMETHING BAD.
YOU BAD BOY!
BAM
...
YOU WALK A LITTLE WEIRD.
IT'S BECAUSE OF ALL THE SPANKING.
ヒョコ WALK
ヒョコ WALK
ヒョコ WALK

DAD'S A LOT MORE TALKATIVE THAN USUAL.
WHEN WE'RE ON A WALK,
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH
WHO TAKES ME OUT ON A WALK.
IT'S ALWAYS DAD
"I SHOULD INVEST IN MYSELF,"
IF I WERE TO SAY SOMETHING RIDICULOUS LIKE,
BECAUSE I COME HOME FROM WORK AS SOON AS I FINISH MY TASK.
I'M ONLY ABLE TO TAKE YOU OUT ON A WALK LIKE THIS
I'M A FATHER BECAUSE INSTEAD OF DOING STUFF I LIKE, I DO STUFF FOR THE FAMILY.
"YES, DAD!"
BE THANKFUL.
AND I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TAKE YOU OUT ON WALKS.
AND WOULD HAVE NO FREE TIME
I'D ALWAYS BE STRESSED OUT,
FREE

AND I GREW 7 YEARS OLDER, IN HUMAN YEARS.

AFTER A YEAR, EVERYONE GREW A YEAR OLDER.

AND JUST LIKE THIS, DAYS WENT BY.



SOME THINGS CHANGED, BUT JUST LIKE ALWAYS, MOM GAVE ME FOOD EVERY DAY, MIKU-CHAN PLAYED WITH ME FROM TIME TO TIME, AND DAD TOOK ME OUT ON WALKS.

HE'S MY DAD, TOO.
BOTH MY BROTHER AND SISTER ARE TAKING TURNS WATCHING HIM, BUT...
MY MOTHER CAN'T TAKE VERY GOOD OF HIM EITHER, SINCE SHE'S ALSO GETTING OLD.
APPARENTLY, THINGS HAVE BEEN HECTIC SINCE MY FATHER COLLAPSED LAST MONTH.
BITE
OKAY.
IF YOU NEED HELP, I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU.
WHAT FEELS BEST.
YOU SHOULD DO WHAT FEELS BEST.
THANKS.
YEAH...
WITH ALL THE GRADUAL CHANGES OVER TIME, THINGS HAVE CHANGED CONSIDERABLY.

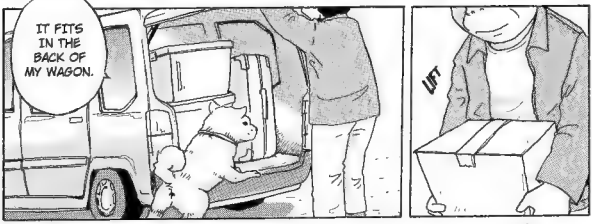
MIKU! ANSWER ME!
I DON'T WANT A REPEAT OF WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME!
HEY MIKU! WHERE ARE YOU GOING AT THIS HOUR?!
ガラッ!!
SHE'LL BE OKAY!
NAH, SHE'S JUST GOING THROUGH PUBERTY.
DAD, YOU NEED TO SET HER STRAIGHT.
SHEESH ...
...
SINCE YOU'RE A WOMAN, I'M LEAVING THIS CASE TO YOU.
AND BESIDES, A FATHER-SISTER RELATIONSHIP IS KIND OF...
MIKU-CHAN RARELY PLAYS WITH ME NOW, AND THESE DAYS, DAD FEEDS ME INSTEAD OF MOM.
BUT IT'S STILL DAD WHO TAKES ME OUT ON WALKS.

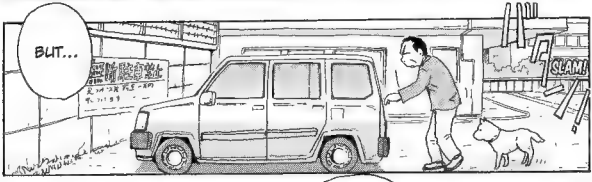
HE USED TO TAKE ME OUT ON WALKS IN THE LATE AFTERNOON,
SOME-THING'S WRONG.
WAIT ...
WE'LL ALWAYS GO ON WALKS TOGETHER, RIGHT, DAD?
AND THE PLACES WE STOP AT
I LOVE WALKS DURING THE DAY, DAD!
ワン!
WOOF!
HE TAKES ME OUT DURING THE DAY.
BUT THESE DAYS,
WAITING
WAITING ...
WERE ALSO DIFFER-ENT.

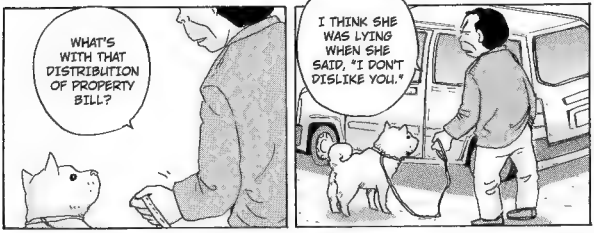
C-COME ON!
WHAT?! YOU WANT TO GET A DIVORCE?!
IS THE FACT THAT DAD STOPPED TALKING AS MUCH.
BUT WHAT CHANGED THE MOST FROM OUR PREVIOUS WALKS,
I REALLY WANT TO GET A DIVORCE.
DIVORCE PAPER
I'M NOT JOKING AROUND.
THIS IS OUT OF NOWHERE, DON'T YOU THINK...?
MY FEELINGS FOR YOU ARENT STRONG ENOUGH...
YOU LOST YOUR JOB AND YOU HAVE A CHRONIC DISEASE.
IT'S JUST...
IT'S NOT THAT I DISLIKE YOU SO MUCH THAT I WANT TO LEAVE YOU.

DEAR.
AREN'T COUPLES SUPPOSED TO WORK TOGETHER WHEN-
WELL,
...TO SUPPORT YOU.
I...
JUST TELL ME, "DO AS YOU LIKE" AS YOU ALWAYS DO.
IT'S NOT THE TIME TO TAKE COUNSEL ANYMORE ...
DAD...
DAD, AREN'T YOU LONELY?

I'M LONELY...
I REALIZED THAT ONLY A SMALL PORTION BELONGED TO ME.
AFTER THEY TOOK THEIR STUFF,

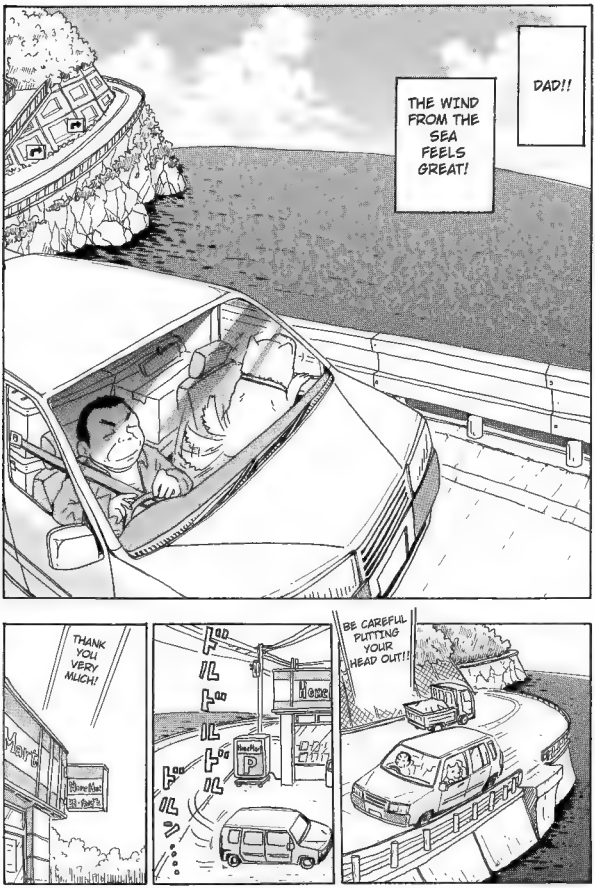

IT FITS IN THE BACK OF MY WAGON.
LIFT


BUT...
SLAM!


WHAT'S WITH THAT DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY BILL?
I THINK SHE WAS LYING WHEN SHE SAID, "I DON'T DISLIKE YOU."

AND THEN WE HAVE TO SPLIT THAT...
WE'RE LEFT WITH ALMOST NOTHING.
IF WE PAID OFF ALL OF OUR LOANS AFTER SELLING THE APARTMENT,
HMM...
PLACES THAT ALLOW PETS HAVE HIGH RENT.
EVEN IF I WERE TO FIND A NEW PLACE TO LIVE
OKAY, I'VE DECIDED!
FAR SOUTH, WHERE I WAS BORN.
LET'S GO SOUTH!

- AND THIS IS HOW OUR JOURNEY BEGAN. -


DAD!!
THE WIND FROM THE SEA FEELS GREAT!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
Mart
ドルドルドルドルドルドルドルドル……
Hotel
P
BE CAREFUL PUTTING YOUR HEAD OUT!!

HUH!?
HERE, I BOUGHT YOU SOME JERKY.
ほら
THESE RIGHT?
THEY WERE SELLING THEM AT THE REGISTER.
OH.
IS THAT YOU DAD?
SUNGLASSES ARE A LITTLE EMBARRASSING FOR SOME REASON.
I NEVER WORE THEM BEFORE...
OF COURSE THEY DO! YOU LOOK "COOL" DAD!
I GUESS THEY DON'T LOOK GOOD?
プシュッ!!
I GUESS I AM JUST GETTING A LITTLE CARRIED AWAY WITH THE FUN...?

TAKING A DRIVE LIKE THIS!!
I MEAN LOOK HOW MUCH FUN WE ARE HAVING
NO, NOT AT ALL!
IT'S FINE DAD.
ブオオオ...
IT'S NOT GOOD FOR YOU THOUGH!!
THIS SHOULD TIE US OVER!!!
SO JUST EAT YOUR JERKY!
はふ
はふ
WITH THE SEA...
WE WILL DRIVE...
ON OUR LEFT.
...
ザザー...

IT WILL TAKE US SOUTH.
IF WE DO THAT...
ブロロロロ
ドルドルドルドル
ドルドルドル...
ヒソヒソ...
ヨコニ...
チラッ!
RIGHT?
BUT THEN YOU WILL BE LONELY...
HERE'S A BLANKET.
I COULD STAY IN A HOTEL...
AND LEAVE YOU HERE IN THE CAR BUT...

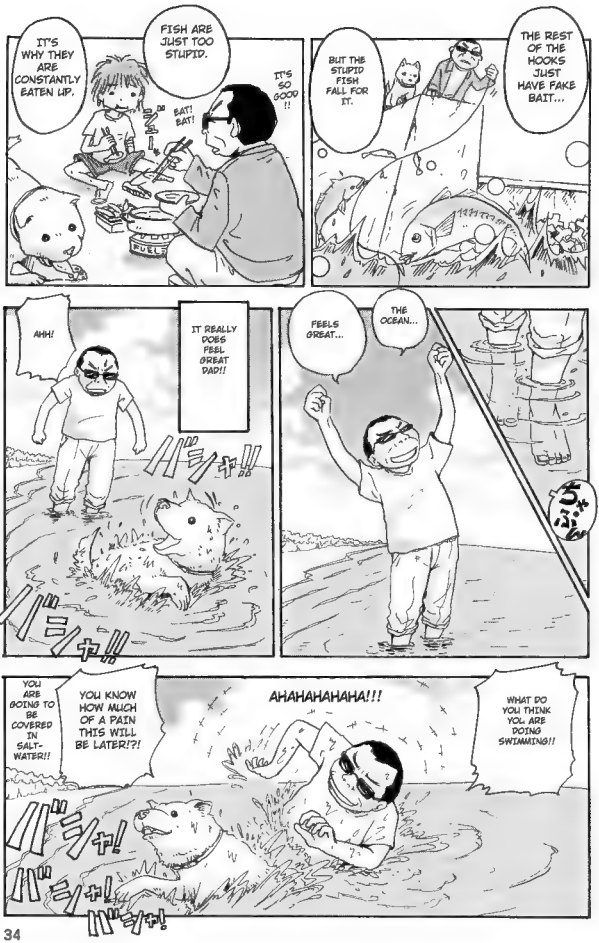
ディスカウント
スーパー ハマムラ
YES DAD!
SO YOU BETTER ...
BE THANKFUL.
HURRY UP AND BUY BREAKFAST DAD!!
FOOD! FOOD! BREAKFAST!

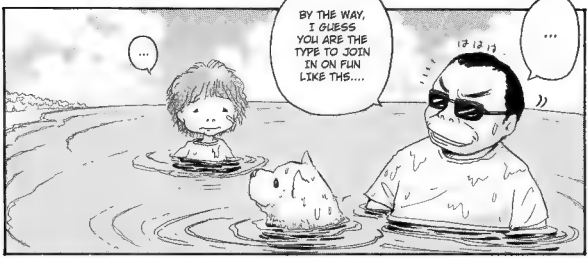
THAT WILL BE 1580 YEN!
...
パサッ
!!
チョコフルネ
I CAN MOSTLY FIGURE OUT WHAT IS WRONG.
JUST LOOKING AT YOU...
ふう
JUST REMEMBER THAT BREAD WAS PROPERLY PAID FOR.
BUT...
ポス...
NO ONE IS GOING TO SCOLD YOU.
HERE!

DAD ...
THIS BOY TASTES REALLY SAD...
IT TASTES LIKE SADNESS BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS.
AND NOT SOMETHING FROM JUST THE LAST FEW DAYS...
I DIDN'T TELL YOU TO GET ON BOARD ...
...
HOWEVER
START
ドルドルドルルル...
フルン!

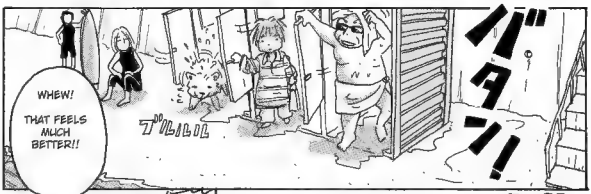
IT'S CALLED "ABDUCTING A MINOR" AND IS A PRETTY SERIOUS OFFENSE.
THIS IS BAD ...
ALTHOUGH THAT'S NOT REALLY MY THING.
SO AT LEAST...
IT'S HIGH RISK, NO RETURN.
MY GRAND-FATHER...
...
TELLING ME ANYTHING AT ALL WOULD BE A BIG HELP...
TELL ME YOUR SITUATION.
YEAH, OKAY.
IS IN HOKKAIDO.
YEAH.

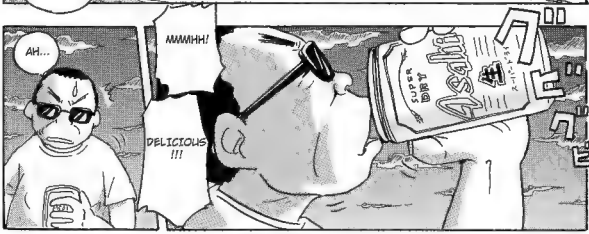
...
...
...
...
IS THAT IT!?
EEEHH!!
...
...
THIS IS A SPECIAL KIND OF LURE.
THERE'S ONLY FOOD IN THE LITTLE BOX BELOW...
IF WE FIND A GOOD SPOT WE CAN TRY TO CATCH SOME FISH TO EAT.
HOW DOES THAT SOUND?
SINCE WE ARE DRIVING ALONG THE SEA.
ポチャ


IT'S WHY THEY ARE CONSTANTLY EATEN UP.
FISH ARE JUST TOO STUPID.
IT'S SO GOOD !!
BAT! BAT!
FUEL
BUT THE STUPID FISH FALL FOR IT.
THE REST OF THE HOOKS JUST HAVE FAKE BAIT...
AHH!
IT REALLY DOES FEEL GREAT DAD!!
バシャ!!
バシャ!!
FEELS GREAT...
THE OCEAN...
ぷかぷか
YOU ARE GOING TO BE COVERED IN SALT-WATER!!
YOU KNOW HOW MUCH OF A PAIN THIS WILL BE LATER!?!
AHAHAHAHAHA!!!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING SWIMMING!!
バシャ!
バシャ!
バシャ!


BY THE WAY, I GUESS YOU ARE THE TYPE TO JOIN IN ON FUN LIKE THS....
...
...

シャーッ!
コインシャワー


バタン!
WHEW! THAT FEELS MUCH BETTER!!


AH...
MMMHH!
DELICIOUS !!!

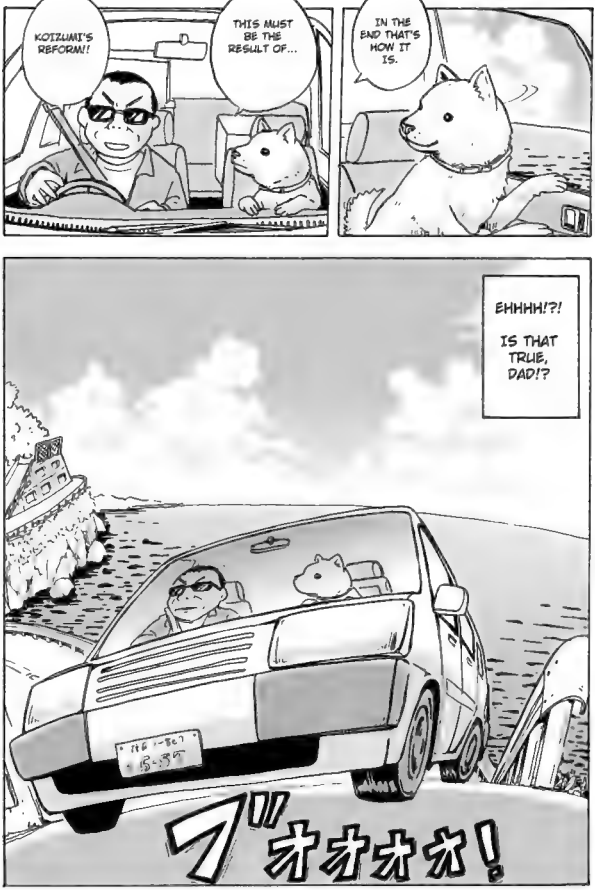
AHH!!
WHOOPS!!!
I DRANK A BEER WITHOUT THINKING!!
EVEN THOUGH I NEED TO TAKE THIS KID HOME!!
I'M SURE THEY ARE ALL SEARCHING FOR YOU
PROBABLY HAVE THE POLICE OUT LOOKING TOO...
さっ!!
THEY AREN'T?
コクッ!
OH WELL...
TOMORROW THEN...
MISTER ...
...
...
I WISH I HAD A DAD AS NICE AS YOU, MISTER.

DAD, I KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON.
I WILL GO BUY US SOME DINNER.
THANKS.
IF YOU ACTUALLY DID...
SEEMS LIKE YOU WOULDN'T THINK THAT ...
HE DIDN'T STOP CRYING UNTIL YOU CAME BACK.
AFTER YOU LEFT, THE BOY HUGGED ONTO ME AND STARTED CRYING.
HUMANS ALWAYS SHOW THEIR TRUE FEELINGS IN FRONT OF DOGS.
I WILL TAKE YOU WHEREVER YOU WANT.
EVEN THE PLACE YOU WERE BEFORE ...
ABOUT TOMORROW ...

GOOD NIGHT...
JUST GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT...
IF THERE IS SOMEONE YOU KNOW, THEIR PLACE IS OKAY TOO.
THEN THAT IS FINE.
IF THERE IS AN ADULT YOU WANT TO TALK TO...
SO...
...
...SO...
HIS ANSWER AFTER THINKING IT OVER...
UNBELIEVABLE AS IT IS...
SO... GUESS WHAT?

IF HE WOULD HAVE SAID SOMETHING I WOULDA BOUGHT A PLANE TICKET FOR HIM!!
IN HOKKAIDO HUH?
HIS GRANDFATHER ...
OR BREAD OR ANYTHING!!
STEALING MY WALLET AND TAKING OFF WITH IT!?
WE LOST ALL OF OUR MONEY OR ANYTHING.
I'M NOT UPSET BECAUSE...
...
NO HOUSE, NO RECORDS, NO MONEY ...
WE ARE NOW HOMELESS AND LIVING OUT OF OUR CAR...
WELL, FROM HERE ON ...
A KID LIKE THAT WHO CANNOT SIMPLY RELY ON PEOPLE.
IT'S JUST TOO SAD.

Hoshi Mamoru Inu ★ Takashi Murakami


KOIZUMI'S REFORM!!
THIS MUST BE THE RESULT OF...
IN THE END THAT'S HOW IT IS.
EHHHH!?!
IS THAT TRUE, DAD!?
ブオオオオ!

ANY WAY...
PEOPLE FREQUENTLY PUSH THE BLAME...
キュオオン!
FOR THEIR OWN UNHAPPINESS ON OTHER THINGS OR PEOPLE...
SO THEY CAN KEEP THEIR OWN EMOTIONAL BALANCE INTACT.
フォオオオ
...
WHEN WE HAVE NOTHING TO SPARE...
I GUESS EVEN THE STUPID FISH SEE THROUGH US...?

SORRY FOR NOT BUYING ANYTHING, MR. STORE CLERK.
BATHROOM BREAK!!
WELL, FOR NOW...
Home Mart
YOU GO AHEAD TOO.
MY PEE WON'T COME OUT...
WELL...
HM? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE, DAD...
...

OUCH! OUCH! OWWCH!!
AND IT HURTS!!!
IT WON'T COME OUT...
WHAT'S THE MATTER!?
DID YOU EAT SOMETHING STRANGE?
HEY, ARE YOU OKAY!?
IT HURST! IT HURTS, DAD!
I'LL GET YOU TO THE HOSPITAL RIGHT NOW!
IT HURTS DAD!
IT HURTS!!

IT WILL BE OKAY!
JUST LEAVE IT TO US!
PLEASE DOCTOR!
HELP HIM!!
PREPARE THE X-RAY!!
DAD
....
.....
OKAY!
JUST CALM DOWN!!
PLEASE HELP!!
EXCUSE ME!!
MY DOG STARTED CRYING OUT IN PAIN WHILE TRYING TO PEE!!
JUST DON'T LEAVE ME BEHIND!!
DAD!
IT HURTS BUT I WILL DEAL WITH IT!!
AH! STOP IT!
STAY STILL!!
ガブ!
WHERE IS DAD!?
DAD!?
DAD!?
!!!
DAD!!
I STILL WANT TO...
GO DRIVING WITH YOU!!

IF WE OPERATE NOW, HE WILL BE FINE.
HE WILL BE OKAY!!
IN DOGS IT CAN CAUSE ACUTE KIDNEY FAILURE AND THE DEATH RATE IS VERY HIGH...
IT TURNED OUT TO BE A KIDNEY STONE...
H-HOW IS HE, DOCTOR?
THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE.
...
DAD...
シュー シュー
カチャ カチャ
DAD...
PLEASE TAKE CARE OF HIM...
T-THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY.
YOU DID WELL.
DAD...
...

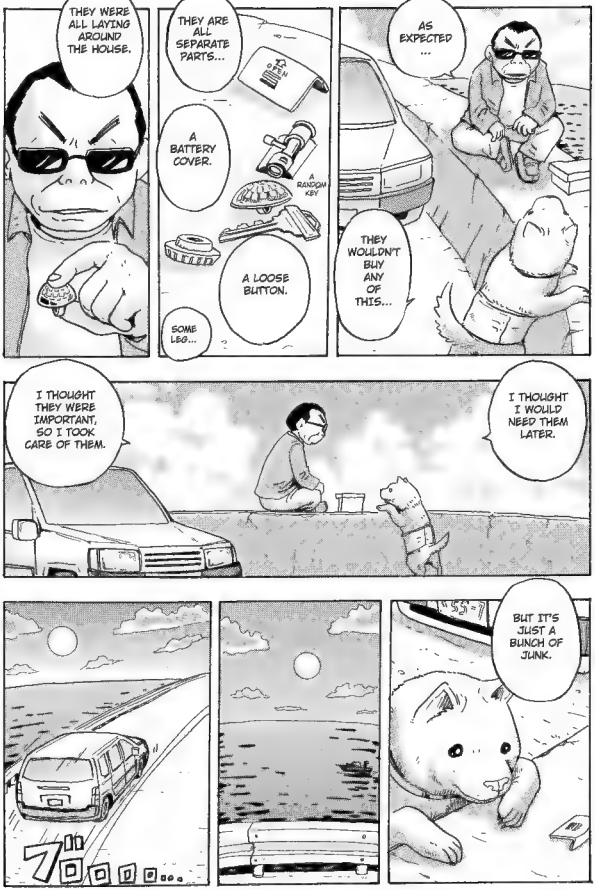
DON'T WORRY. I WON'T LEAVE YOU BEHIND.
WE WILL START OFF ONCE AGAIN, WHEN YOU ARE BETTER.
DAD, I...
IF INSURANCE IS NOT APPLICABLE, IT BECOMES SO EXPENSIVE...
...
IT'S NOT LIKE WE ARE IN A HURRY...
...
パチ!
リサイクルショップ

SIGN: RECYCLE SHOP

HURRY ...
...
HURRY UP AND COME BACK...
DAD!!
DAD!!
ペロペロ
ペロペロ
ペロペロ
OK!

TAKE CARE!!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
DAD!! DAD!!
DAD! DAD! DADDY!
BUT...
HEY HEY! CALM DOWN!
DAD!! WE ARE GOING BACK ON A DRIVE RIGHT!!
AH...
EVERYTHING BESIDES THE COMPUTER...
CLEARED OUT...
THINGS SURE HAVE...
がらーん

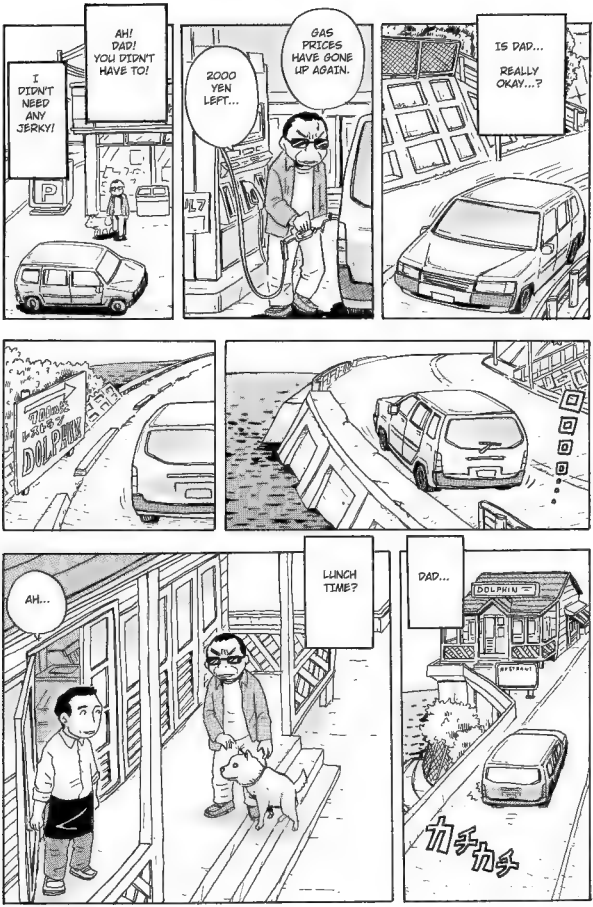
ブロロロ…
...AND MY HEIRLOOM WATCH ...
WAS DIRT CHEAP THOUGH.
カッカッカッ
キュ～ッ!
HM?!
OH, THAT?


THEY WERE ALL LAYING AROUND THE HOUSE.
THEY ARE ALL SEPARATE PARTS...
A BATTERY COVER.
A RANDOM KEY
A LOOSE BUTTON.
SOME LEGO...
AS EXPECTED ...
THEY WOULDN'T BUY ANY OF THIS...
I THOUGHT THEY WERE IMPORTANT, SO I TOOK CARE OF THEM.
I THOUGHT I WOULD NEED THEM LATER.
ZOOO

IT SURE IS STRANGE.
JUST HAVING YOU BESIDE ME...
EVEN AFTER LOSING EVERYTHING.
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
MAKES ME REALLY HAPPY...
YOU'RE MAKING ME BLUSH...

DAD?
DAD!
ARE YOU OKAY!?
...
DON'T WORRY.
IT WILL BE OVER SOON...
はーっ
はーっ
はーっ
はっ
...
WELL...
IT WAS JUST A TEMPORARY SOLUTION ANYWAY...
ポイ
グラッ
グラッ
...
ドルルル

D-DAD!?
...
バン
キュッ!
ARE YOU OKAY!?
DAD!!
はーっ
はーっ
はーっ
...
はーっ
はーっ
はーっ
HAAH
HAAH
...
I'M SORRY, HAPPY!!
IT'S STRANGE FOR YOU TO APOLOGIZE DAD!!


I DIDN'T NEED ANY JERKY!
AH! DAD! YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO!
2000 YEN LEFT...
GAS PRICES HAVE GONE UP AGAIN.
IS DAD... REALLY OKAY...?
DOLPHIN
AH...
LUNCH TIME?
DAD...
DOLPHIN
RESTAURANT
カチカチ

I WILL JUST WAIT OUTSIDE, DAD.
WE DON'T ALLOW PETS INSIDE OUR RESTARAUNT.
I'M SORRY, BUT...
OH!
WITHOUT HIS HELP I'M IN A LITTLE BIT OF TROUBLE THOUGH...
THAT'S TOO BAD...
IF THATS THE CASE, THEN PLEASE COME THIS WAY ...
Welcome
SORRY ABOUT THAT...
SO YOU BETTER ENJOY IT!!
I CAN'T BUY ANYMORE,
LET ME HAVE THAT...
IF YOU HAVE A LUNCH SET...

I WANT TO LEAVE AT LARGE THE BAD THINGS...
OUR LAST PIECE OF LUXURY.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
ISN'T IT STRANGE? HE HAS NO WHITE CANE OR HARNESS.
WELL, THERE ARE NO OTHER CUSTOMERS. SO
AFTER SAYING THAT...
DAD JUST STARED OFF ACROSS THE OCEAN.
FOR A REAL LONG, LONG,
TIME...
AND ATE HIS LUNCH SLOWLY AS IT BECAME EVENING.

AFTER GOING DOWN THE HILL THE RESTAURANT WAS ON...
IS FINE.
THIS WAY...
THE SEA ...
HUH? DAD!?
RUNNNING ON EMPTY...
...

ガタガタ
ガタ
ガタガタ
ガタ
ガタ
THAT'S A CAMP GROUND.
NO ONE ALLOWED EXCEPT HAPPY FAMILIES.
県民キャンプ場
3KM
I WONDER HOW FAR IT CAN GO.
キュルル
PLONK!
CLANG!
キュルル
CLANG!
キュルル
PLONK!
PLONK!
I GUESS THIS IS...
OUR LAST STOP...
...

DAD ...
THIS IS OUR DESTINATION.
DON'T WEAR YOURSELF OUT ALREADY...
NICE AND WIDE!
IT SEEMS PRETTY NICE HERE!
WE ARE FINALLY HERE HUH!!
AH! ARE WE GOING FOR A WALK ALREADY DAD!!
FIRST, LET'S HEAD...
TO THE CAMP GROUND.
ふぅ....
HEY!

I'M A PRETTY SMART GUY!
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED ...
HOWEVER ...
FAMILY CAMPING GROUND
ファミリーキャンプ場
SINCE 1980
PEOPLE THROW AWAY PLENTY OF GOOD STUFF...
THROWING AWAY ALL THEIR FOOD BEFORE GOING HOME...
AND FOR FOOD...
燃えるゴミ
WE CAN GET AS MUCH WATER AS WE NEED.
AT THIS CAMP GROUND ...
LIVING OFF THESE LEFTOVERS ...
LET'S SEE HOW FAR WE CAN GO,
WE EVEN HAVE SOME USEFUL INFO POSTED ON THEIR BULLETIN BOARD.
EDIBLE PLANTS

...
...
HARDER THAN AT SEA.
THESE RIVER FISH ARE A BIT HARDER TO CATCH.
ACORNS ARE EASY THOUGH!
カサッ!
AND THEY ARE EVEN MORE USEFUL IF WE TURN THEM INTO POWDER.
IF WE ROAST THEM, WE CAN EAT THEM AS IS...

EVEN THESE THINGS BECOME FUN.
WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE...
THIS IS THE COVER TO THE ALARM CLOCK THAT MIKU GAVE ME AS HER FIRST FATHER'S DAY PRESENT.
IF I THINK BACK, I CAN REMEMBER WHAT THESE ARE FROM.
AND THIS ONE IS ...

HAS GOTTEN COLD...
IT SURE...
COLDER NOW...
IT'S EVEN...
BUT YOU ARE...
STILL WARM, AREN'T YOU ...

YOU WANT OUTSIDE?
HM!?
カリカリ
カリカリ
カリカリ
カリカリ
...
カチャ!
DAD!
DAD!!
LET'S GO FOR A WALK!
GO AHEAD ...
I WILL BE RIGHT THERE.

...
DAD...
ARE YOU ...HUNGRY?
THERE ISN'T MUCH FOOD ANYMORE DAD...
SINCE IT TURNED COLD...
THERE IS STILL SOME FOOD IN THE BACK THAT LOOKS OKAY, RIGHT?
NO ...
WHAT ABOUT YOU DAD?
もそもそもそ
WHEW...

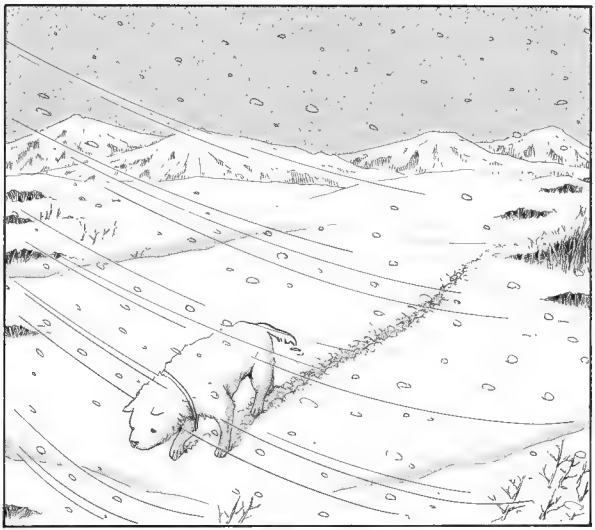
THERE ARE A LOT OF STARS IN THE SKY AREN'T THERE?
TODAY...
DAD ...
I CAN'T SEE WELL...
BUT I CAN HEAR THE SOUNDS ...
OF ALL THE STARS ...

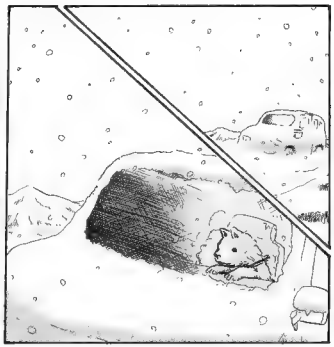
...
...
OH YEAH...
HUH!?
WHILE I CAN STILL MOVE...
カチャ
.....
THANK YOU....
DAD ...
HAPPY ....
WHY ARE YOU THANKING ME ....

AFTER OPENING THE DOOR, DAD WENT TO SLEEP.
AND JUST LIKE THAT...
HE KEPT SLEEPING ...
TO NEVER ...
WAKE AGAIN.
DAD, I AM BORED!!
LET'S GO...
カカ
FOR A WALK!!

STINKY!!
YOU ARE GET-TING REALLY
DAD, IF YOU DON'T TAKE A BATH EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE ...
AH! HEY YOU BUGS!
GET OFF OF DAD!!
ダダダ
ダダダ!!

DAD!!
GET BETTER!!
DAD!!
DAD!!
DAD!! WAKE UP! EAT SOME-THING!!
TODAY I FOUND SOME FOOD!!
DAD!!
...
UM ...
HE WON'T PLAY OR TALK WITH ME ...
... THIS IS BORING ...

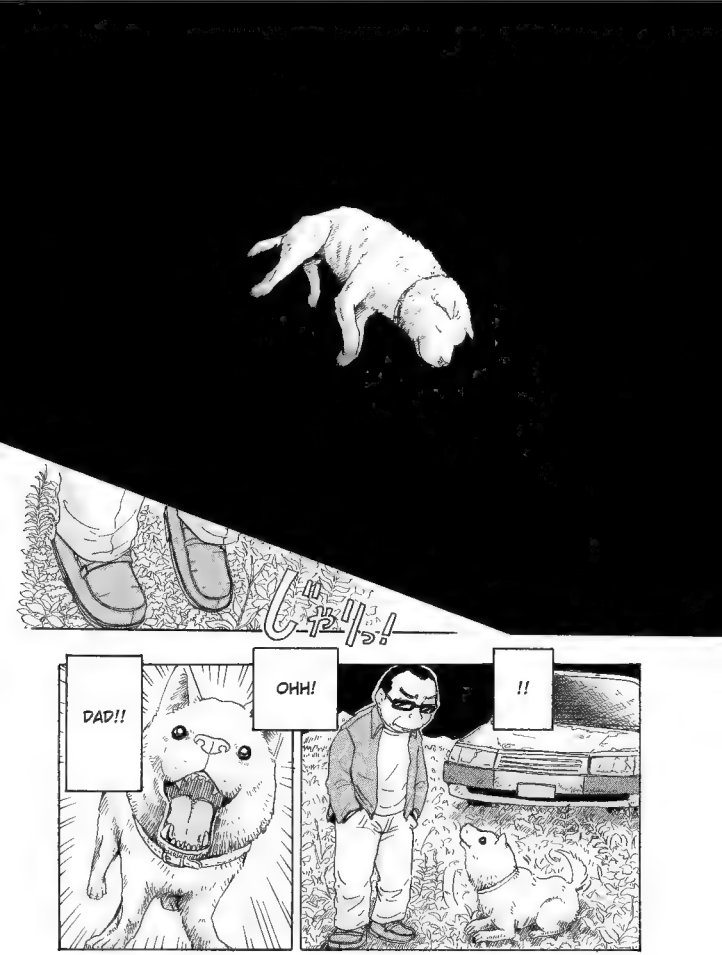




GAINED MORE THAN THE USUAL 7 YEARS...
I THINK I...
IN THE NEXT YEAR,
ファミリーキャンプ場
—Since. 1980—
DAD...
MOM...
MIKU...
!!

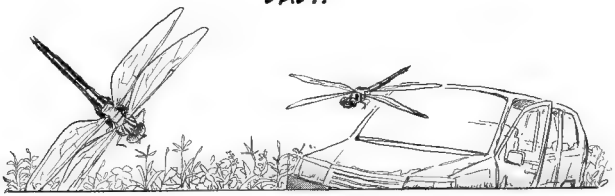
GET BACK!!
A WILD DOG!!
AHHH!!
ワフッ
ワフッワフッ
DAD!!
MOM!!
MIKU!!
HUH!?
CAN'T ...
EVEN I...
...

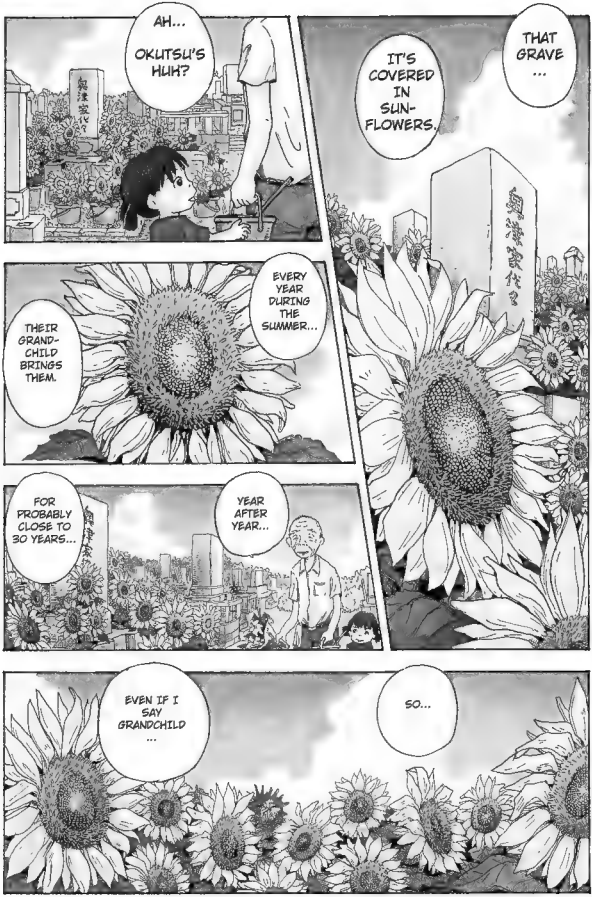
THERE ARE LOTS OF STARS OUT AGAIN TONIGHT...
DAD ...
I AM SO TIRED NOW...


じゃりっ!
DAD!!
OHH!
!!

YOU FINALLY WOKE UP!!
DAD!!
DAD!!!
ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT!!
LET'S GET GOING.
ALRIGHT ...
DAD!!
YAY!!
DAD!!
I'M SORRY!!
I'M REALLY SORRY!!
YAY!!
I WAS GETTING TIRED OF WAITING FOR YOU!!
SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
GOING FOR A WALK FINALLY!!
AH!
ARE WE...

DAD!!



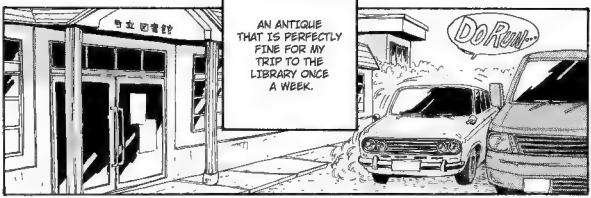

AH...
OKUTSU'S HUH?
THAT GRAVE ...
IT'S COVERED IN SUN-FLOWERS.
EVERY YEAR DURING THE SUMMER...
THEIR GRAND-CHILD BRINGS THEM.
FOR PROBABLY CLOSE TO 30 YEARS...
YEAR AFTER YEAR...
SO...
EVEN IF I SAY GRANDCHILD ...

HE IS PROBABLY CLOSE TO FIFTY NOW...
日輪草
THE SUNFLOWER FIELD

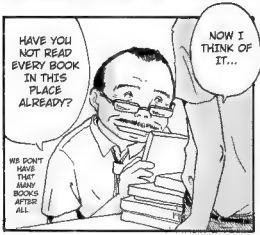
HMM?
...
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
PID
パサ
パサ
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
OOOMPH...
THE WATER FILTER...
MUST BE CLOGGED UP WITH RUST FROM THE WATER PIPE.
NEXT IS THE WATER SYSTEM.
AFTER I'VE FIXED THE ROOF,

LEFT BEHIND...
MY GRANDPARENTS WHO RAISED ME LIKE THEIR OWN CHILD...
AN EXTREMELY BREEZY HOUSE
BEEN HERE FOR 58 YEARS.
TAPE DUPE

AND ENOUGH SUNFLOWERS TO COVER THE ENTIRE BACKYARD.
BUVO VO VO VO
AND A BLUEBIRD
カシ!
CCRRRR
BUILT IN 1964.
ブボッ
ボボボボ....
BUT IF I WOULDN'T USE IT AT ALL, IT WOULD GET IN A BAD CONDITION.
Wooon
IF I WOULD USE IT TOO OFTEN, IT WOULD BREAK DOWN.

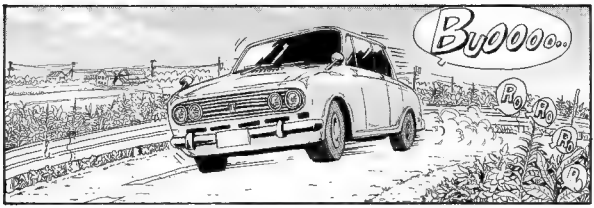

AN ANTIQUE THAT IS PERFECTLY FINE FOR MY TRIP TO THE LIBRARY ONCE A WEEK.
DoRew...

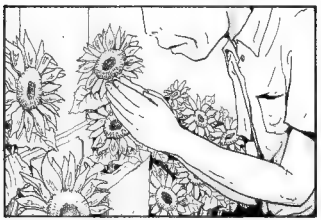
hig
本日 7月
返却日 8月
ガスン!

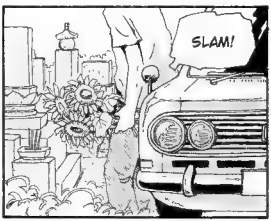

HAVE YOU NOT READ EVERY BOOK IN THIS PLACE ALREADY?
NOW I THINK OF IT...
WE DON'T HAVE THAT MANY BOOKS AFTER ALL

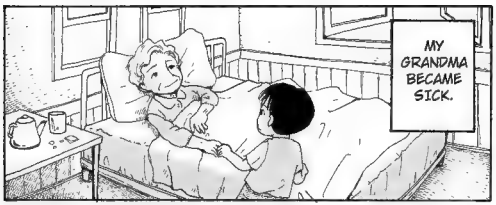
SO THAT MUST MEAN TODAY IS SATURDAY.
AH... MR. OKUTSU.

YOU'VE REALLY READ HALF?
EVEN THOUGH SMALL, IT'S STILL A LIBRARY...
UNTIL ABOUT N FOR HUMANITIES AND S FOR HISTORY..
NO, NO. MAYBE ABOUT HALFWAY NOW.


BUOOOO..
RO-RO-RO

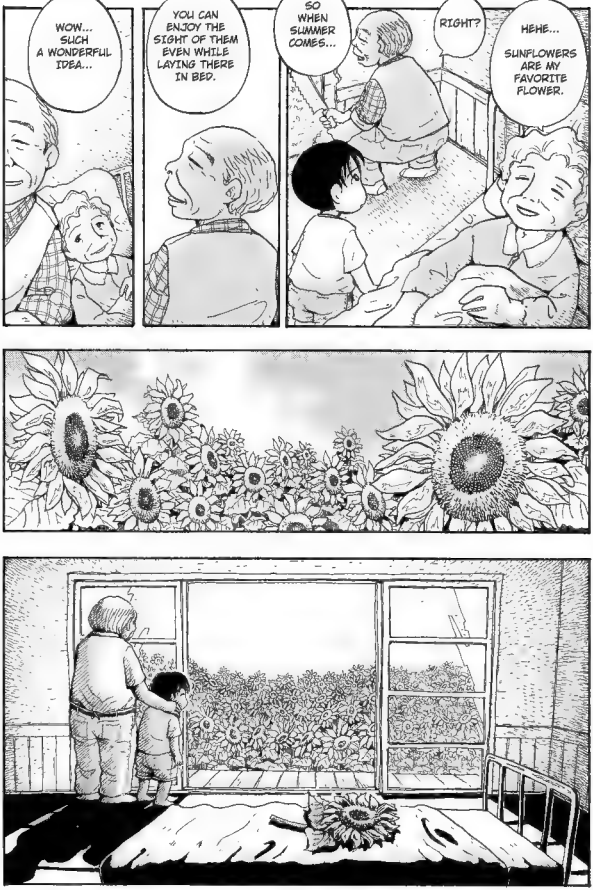


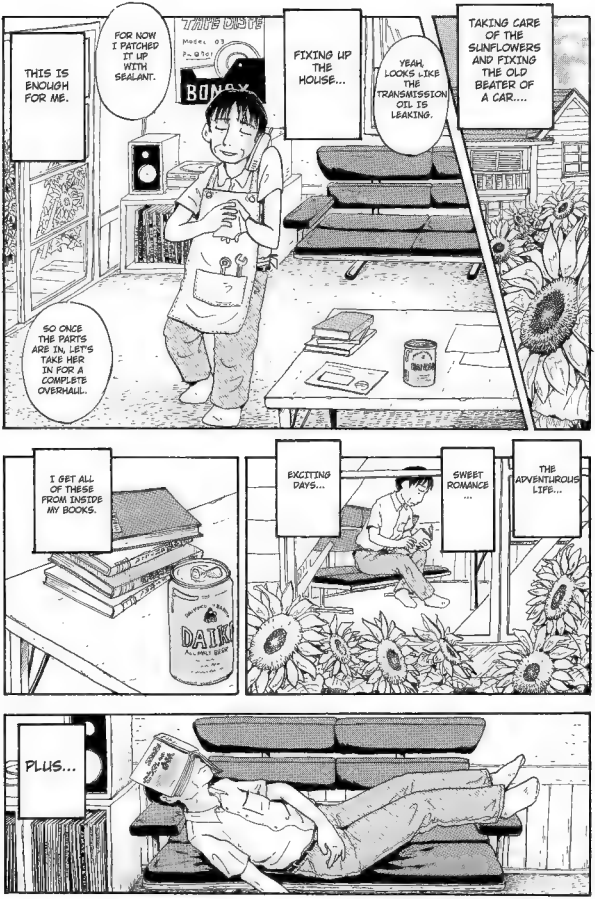

SLAM!


MY GRANDMA BECAME SICK.
WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD,

AND LEFT TO GET HER MEDICINE BEFORE COMING BACK.
MY GRANDPA LISTENED TO THE DOCTORS

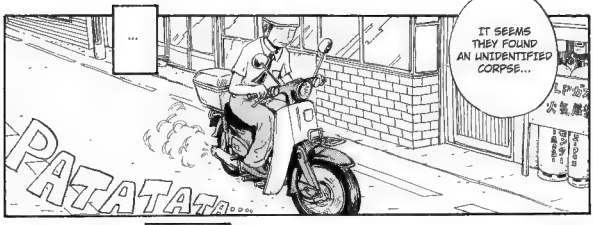
CRRRBAK!
AFTER THAT, HE SUDDENLY STARTED BREAKING DOWN A WALL.
ガッ!!
CRAACK!
CRAACK!
KYOSUKE, IT'S DANGEROUS, SO STAY BACK.
HMM... I WAS THINKING OF PUTTING IN A BALCONY RIGHT HERE.
CRAACK!
CRAACK!
CRAACK!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING GRANDPA?
I AM GOING TO PLANT A TON OF SUNFLOWERS IN THE BACK-YARD.
WHEN I FINISH THE BALCONY...


WOW... SUCH A WONDERFUL IDEA...
YOU CAN ENJOY THE SIGHT OF THEM EVEN WHILE LAYING THERE IN BED.
SO WHEN SUMMER COMES...
RIGHT?
HEHE... SUNFLOWERS ARE MY FAVORITE FLOWER.


THIS IS ENOUGH FOR ME.
FOR NOW I PATCHED IT UP WITH SEALANT.
FIXING UP THE HOUSE...
YEAH, LOOKS LIKE THE TRANSMISSION OIL IS LEAKING.
TAKING CARE OF THE SUNFLOWERS AND FIXING THE OLD BEATER OF A CAR....
SO ONCE THE PARTS ARE IN, LET'S TAKE HER IN FOR A COMPLETE OVERHAUL.
I GET ALL OF THESE FROM INSIDE MY BOOKS.
EXCITING DAYS...
SWEET ROMANCE ...
THE ADVENTUROUS LIFE...
PLUS...

THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH OF THAT AT WORK ALREADY.
IF I REALLY WANT TO BE CONFRONTED WITH THE HARDSHIPS CAUSED BY LIFE...
AH... I SEE ...
GRANDMA! LOOKS LIKE THE CASE WORKER IS HERE...
MS. KATAHIRA! IT'S OKUTSU!
DEALING WITH THESE HARDSHIPS ...
IT'S FINE! TAKE JUST LIKE THAT.
MS KATAHIRA, DID YOU FILL OUT THAT FORM FROM LAST TIME?
IT'S PART OF MY JOB AS A CASE WORKER.
PATA PA-TA
TATA...

EVEN WHEN IT IS SUCH A SERIOUS MATTER TO THEM.
I AM TIRED OF HAVING TO MAKE EXCUSES OR APOLOGIES FOR MY OWN LACK OF POWER ...
HM?
BUT THERE ARE SO MANY WHERE NOTHING CAN BE DONE...
ESPECIALLY LATELY...
IT'S BEST TO BE BUSINESSLIKE AND PROMPTLY SHIFT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE NEXT CASE. IT'S BEST FOR EVERYONE IN THE END.
INSTEAD OF GETTING STUCK ON A SINGLE CASE...
I SEE YOU'RE STILL HAVING YOUR DRY HUMOR AS USUAL.
WE COULD HAVE OUR OWN LIBRARY OF BOOKS.
IF WE TOOK ALL THESE REPORTS AND PUT THEM TOGETHER.
YOU HAVE A CALL FROM THE POLICE STATION!!
YES?
MR. OKUTSU!
WE CAN DO IT, YOSHISAKI!!
...
YEAH, I UNDERSTAND THAT, BUT...

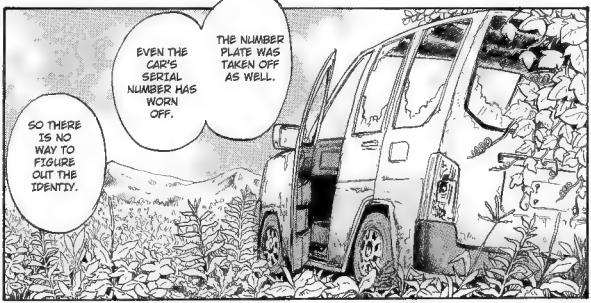

...
IT SEEMS THEY FOUND AN UNIDENTIFIED CORPSE...
PATATATA...

MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THIS,
BUT IT'S ALSO A CASE WORKER'S JOB TO TAKE CARE OF UNIDENTIFIED BODIES.

IT WAS FOUND IN AN ABANDONED CAR ON A FOREST PATH.

HAVING YOU COME ALL THE WAY DOWN HERE.
AH... SORRY ABOUT THIS.

...
IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY THE PERSON.
OF COURSE THERE WAS NO ID, WALLET OR ANY-THING ELSE,


SO THERE IS NO WAY TO FIGURE OUT THE IDENTIY.
EVEN THE CAR'S SERIAL NUMBER HAS WORN OFF.
THE NUMBER PLATE WAS TAKEN OFF AS WELL.

I SUPPOSE SO.
YEAH...
I SUPPOSE IT WOULDN'T HAVE ENDED LIKE THIS.
IF THIS MAN HAD COME TO TALK TO YOU WHEN HE WAS STILL ALIVE...

WELL I SUPPOSE IT WAS THE LAST STOP FOR A PERSON LIVING OUT OF HIS CAR.
A MAN OF ABOUT 40-50 WHO HAS BEEN DEAD FOR ABOUT ONE YEAR OR SO.

THE DATE OF DEATH FOR THE DOG IS QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT FROM HIS, IT DIED ONLY ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO.
THERE WAS ALSO A BODY OF A DOG THAT WE BELIEVE WAS THE MAN'S PET, RESTING AT HIS FEET.

AND FURTHER...

AND WAS JUST WAITING FOR HIM TO WAKE UP AGAIN...
PROBABLY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND HIS MASTER'S DEATH...
...
YEAH.
A DOG?
...
YEAH, I GUESS SO.
WAITING FOR YOU.
DOGS ARE ALWAYS...
MY GRANDPA BROUGHT HOME A PUPPY FOR ME.
TAKE CARE OF HIM.
FROM TODAY THIS IS YOUR PUPPY.
NOT LONG AFTER GRANDMA DIED...
KYOSUKE!!

HERE YA GO!
NOW THAT IT WAS JUST ME AND MY GRANDPA LEFT.
THE PUPPY MANAGED TO FILL THE EMPTY SPOT THAT WAS LEFT...
OH WOW! A SKY-HYDA!
I ONLY PLAYED WITH HIM AT THE START.
BUT STILL ...
IT'S FINE! HE WI... GO HOME ON HIS OWN.
YOUR DOG IS FOLLOWING!
I QUICKLY FORGOT HIM AND FOUND NEW THINGS TO BE ENTERTAINED BY.

HE WOULD BE SO HAPPY THAT IT MADE ME FEEL BAD FOR IGNORING HIM...
AND EVEN WHEN I DID HAPPEN TO PLAY WITH HIM A LITTLE BIT...
コロ コロ...
HE WOULD JUST WAIT FOR ME WITH THE BALL IN HIS MOUTH.
SO THAT WE COULD PLAY WHENEVER.
PATA TATA TATA...
VRROOOM!
DOGS ARE ALWAYS WAITING FOR YOU.
AND SINCE THE CAR IS IN A DIFFICULT SPOT TO GET A WRECKER IN, WE HAVE LEFT IT AT THE SITE.
ALSO, THE BODY IS BEING HELD AT THE POLICE DEPARTMENT.
Wiiii nNooo

NO REASON TO STORE THE DOG AT THE STATION AS WELL.
I SUPPOSE THEY TOOK CARE OF IT WHILE SEARCHING THE CAR...
...AH...
...WHAT ABOUT THE DOG?
...
PASS!
PASS!
PASS!
IF WE DETERMINE THE IDENTITY THE REMAINS WILL GO TO HIS FAMILY.
SCREECH!!
THE REMAINS WILL BE STORED IN A CREMATORY FOR ONE YEAR.
AND DO THE POLICE PAPERWORK. THE DATE FOR THE CREMATION IS IN FIVE DAYS.
WE ASK A FUNERAL HOME TO TAKE THE BODY FOR US.
RO!
RO RO!
RO RO!
IF NOT, THEN HE WILL FOREVER BE STUCK WITH NO ONE PRAYING FOR HIS SOUL.
CA-CHINK!

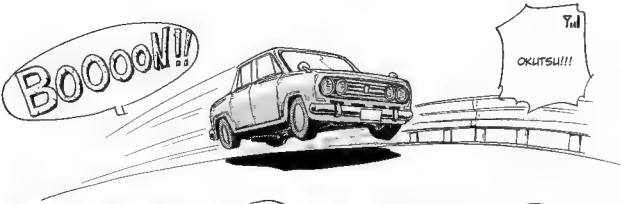
THIS IS THE CAR HUH?
...!?
HE WAS BURIED HERE I GUESS.
THE DOG...
...

IF I RESEARCH THIS, I CAN PROBABLY FIGURE OUT HIS IDENTITY...
古物営業法第十八条 取引相手の帳簿記載義務
ARTICLE 16 OF THE ANTIQUE DEALINGS ACT: REQUIRED TO RECORD THE ACCOUNT OF THE SELLER
A RECEIPT FROM A RECYCLE SHOP...
...
WELL, WELL.
LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER JOB.
I HEAD OUT.
THE NEXT DAY...
BOUNCE
HEADING NORTH WITH THE SEA ON MY RIGHT...!
I BACKTRACK ALONG THE SAME PATH THAT THE MAN AND DOG CAME.
DORURU!

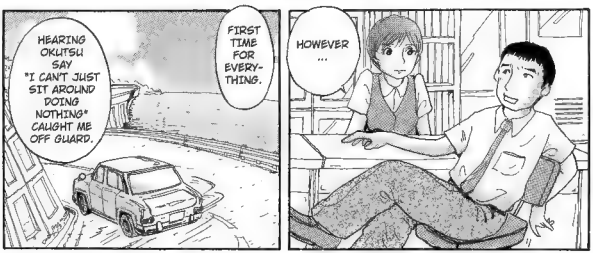
WHAT!!
OKUTSU TOOK THE DAY OFF!?!?

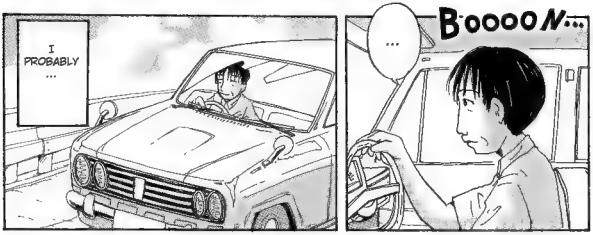
YOU WANT TO GIVE HIM A RING?
HE SAID TO GIVE HIM A CALL IF WE NEEDED ANYTHING WHILE HE WAS GONE.
ゴロ…
AH! NO WAY!
BAAH! I HAD SOMETHING TO ASK HIM TOO!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TAKING VACATION SO SUDDENLY!?
AH... IT'S YOU...
IS THAT YOU OKUTSU?! IT'S ME, YOSHIZAKI!!
HELLO!
SO I AM JUST GOING THERE IN PERSON.
WHEN I CONTACTED THEM THEY TOLD ME THEY COULDN'T PASS ON PERSONAL INFORMATION OVER THE PHONE...
IT'S ABOUT THE RECYLCE SHOP CONNECTED TO THAT RECENT JOHN DOE...
BU
OOOH!

YEAH, BUT THAT WOULD TAKE TOO MUCH TIME...
WRITE OUT THE FORMS... SEND THEM OFF... ETC.
A SIMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY WOULD HAVE BEEN FINE!!
ISN'T IT REALLY FAR OUT THERE!?
WHAT!? WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF YOUR WORK? ARE YOU JUST GOING TO FORGET ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE!?
SO I DECIDED TO GO MYSELF.
I COULDN'T JUST SIT AROUND DOING ANYTHING
GUOOOOOON!!
THAT'S WHAT IS GOING ON, SO IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE, I AM HANGING UP.
THAT'S WHY I TOOK A DAY OFF AND CAME HERE ON MY OWN TIME.
OKUTSU!!
IT'S FAR ENOUGH FOR A TRAIN OR PLANE...
YOU ARE GOING IN THAT OLD BEATER OF YOURS!?
BEEP *BEEP*
WHAT!! YOU ARE DRIVING!? DON'T TELL ME...
IT'S A TRAFFIC VIOLATION TO TALK ON THE PHONE WHILE DRIVING.

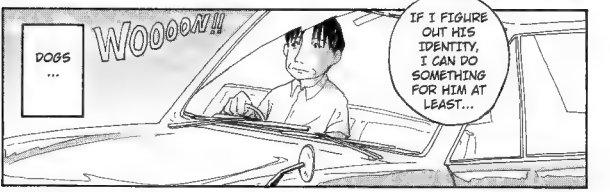

BOOOON!!
OKUTSU!!!

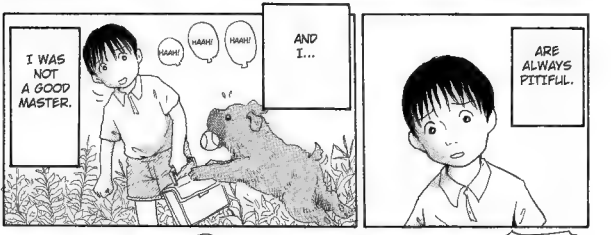
GOING THAT FAR IN THAT OLD CAR!?
HE'S NEVER COMING BACK.
NO GOOD....

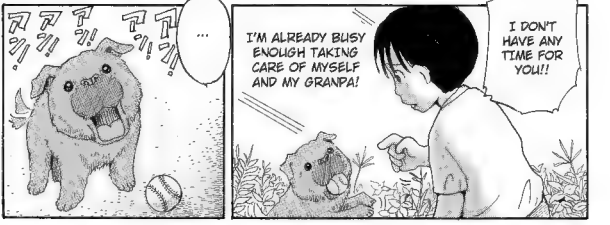

HEARING OKUTSU SAY "I CAN'T JUST SIT AROUND DOING NOTHING" CAUGHT ME OFF GUARD.
FIRST TIME FOR EVERY-THING.
HOWEVER ...


I PROBABLY ...
...
BOOOON...

LEFT ALL ALONE NEXT TO THAT SCRAP HEAP.
THINKING ABOUT THAT POOR DOG,
COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL PITY,


DOGS ...
Woooon!!
IF I FIGURE OUT HIS IDENTITY, I CAN DO SOMETHING FOR HIM AT LEAST...


I WAS NOT A GOOD MASTER.
HAAH!
HAAH!
HAAH!
AND I...
ARE ALWAYS PITIFUL.


アン!
アン!
アン!
アン!
...
I'M ALREADY BUSY ENOUGH TAKING CARE OF MYSELF AND MY GRANPA!
I DON'T HAVE ANY TIME FOR YOU!!

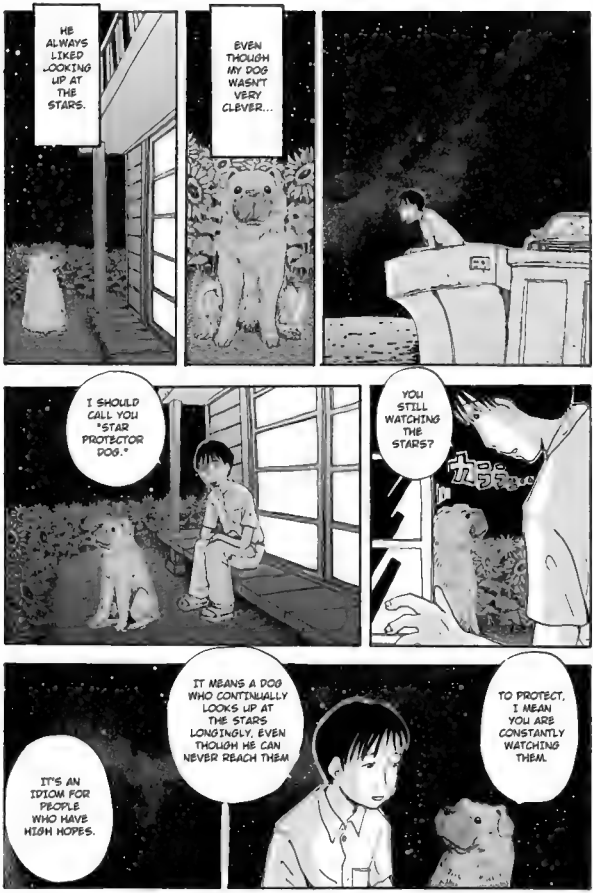
SO I PRETENDED TO PLAY AND...
A DOG ALWAYS WAITING FOR ME AND BUGGING ME TO PLAY JUST IRRITATED ME...
JUST THREW THE BALL AT HIS NOSE AS HARD AS I COULD.
キャン キャン キャン キャン
...
BUT MY DOG...
DIDN'T HAVE A TRACE OF BLAME OR RESENTMENT IN HIS EYES...

HE JUST LOOKED AT ME AS IF SAYING, "SORRY, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE RULES TO THIS GAME..."
THAT'S ALL HIS EXPRESSION SAID...
...
DORURU...
FLOATING LIGHTLY AROUND...
THE GENTLY CURVING OCEAN ROAD.
I DID JUST GET HER BACK FROM AN OVERHAUL.
I HAVE BEEN PUSHING HER PRETTY HARD...
BUT SHE SEEMS TO DOING JUST FINE SO FAR.

GASSN
GASSN
GA
THE SALTY BREEZE!!
DANCING ALONG WITH
I GUESS I PUSHED HER TOO FAR.
...
GA
GUUU
LOOKS LIKE PERCOLATION ...
SHOW
NO, THAT'S NOT IT.
DID IT OVERHEAT ?
BOOONI

IF I LET IT COOL DOWN, IT WILL BE FINE...
PERCOLATION...
THE GAS IN THE PIPES VAPORIZES AND CAUSES TROUBLE BY RUNNING LOW ON GAS.
THE SEA...
HAS CALMED DOWN.
...
...
SURE IS QUIET...
大洗観光
3.0

WHEN I WAS 18, MY GRANDPA SUDDENLY SUFFERED A STROKE AND PASSED AWAY.
WHEN WE FOUND HIM IN THE GARDEN, SURROUNDED BY SUNFLOWERS,
HIS BODY WAS ALREADY COLD.
THE ONLY ONE STILL WITH ME AFTER I LOST EVERYONE ELSE...
WAS MY DOG.
カリカリカリ
カリカリカリ
WHILE HUGGING ONTO HIS WARMTH, I REALIZED SOMETHING.
MY GRANDPA...
HE MUST HAVE CONSIDERED THIS WHEN HE BROUGHT THIS DOG HOME TO BE PART OF OUR FAMILY...


HE ALWAYS LIKED LOOKING UP AT THE STARS.
EVEN THOUGH MY DOG WASN'T VERY CLEVER...
I SHOULD CALL YOU "STAR PROTECTOR DOG."
YOU STILL WATCHING THE STARS?
カコ
IT'S AN IDIOM FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE HIGH HOPES.
IT MEANS A DOG WHO CONTINUALLY LOOKS UP AT THE STARS LONGINGLY, EVEN THOUGH HE CAN NEVER REACH THEM
TO PROTECT. I MEAN YOU ARE CONSTANTLY WATCHING THEM.

EVEN THOUGH STARING AT SOMETHING YOU CAN NEVER HAVE...
...SEEMS USELESS.
THE BLUEBIRD WAS RUNNING PERFECT AGAIN.
BUOOO
THE NEXT MORNING.
AH... HERE IT IS.
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP.
HMR

... HIS DOG'S?
HE NEEDED THE MONEY FOR HIS DOG'S SURGERY BILL.
YEAH, I REMEMBER HIM WELL ...
YOSHIO MAEDA ...
ALL THAT FOR HIS DOG ...
YEAH, HE SOLD EVERYTHING HE HAD TO PAY FOR IT.
HE SOLD EVEN THINGS HE MIGHT NEED IN THE FUTURE...
...
DURORORO...

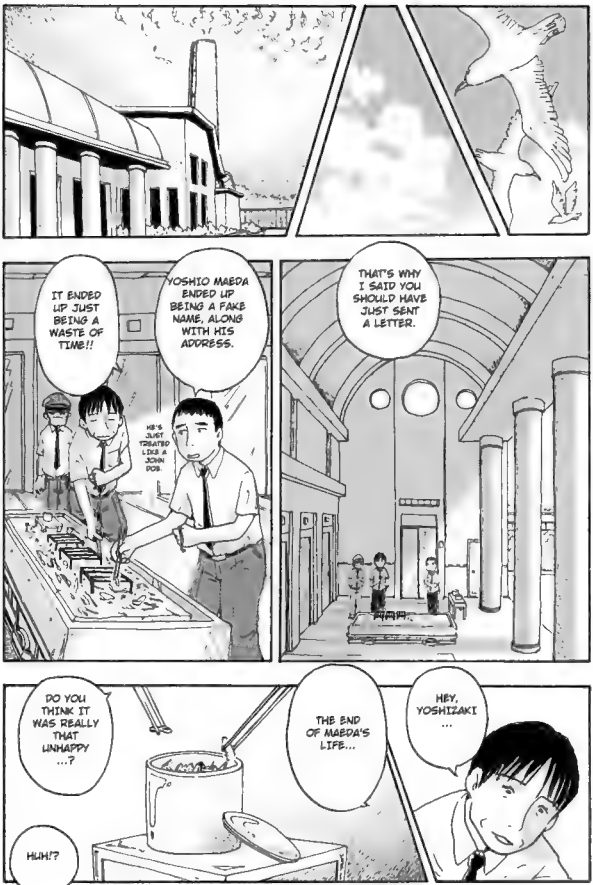
IT MUST HAVE BEEN A COMPLETELY PURE AND INNOCENT TIME TOGETHER.
RORORo...
I IMAGINE YOSHIO MAEDA AND HIS DOG ENJOYING THEIR DRIVE.
AS I HEAD BACK SOUTH WITH THE SEA ON MY LEFT...
PUAAAAN!
I...
I....

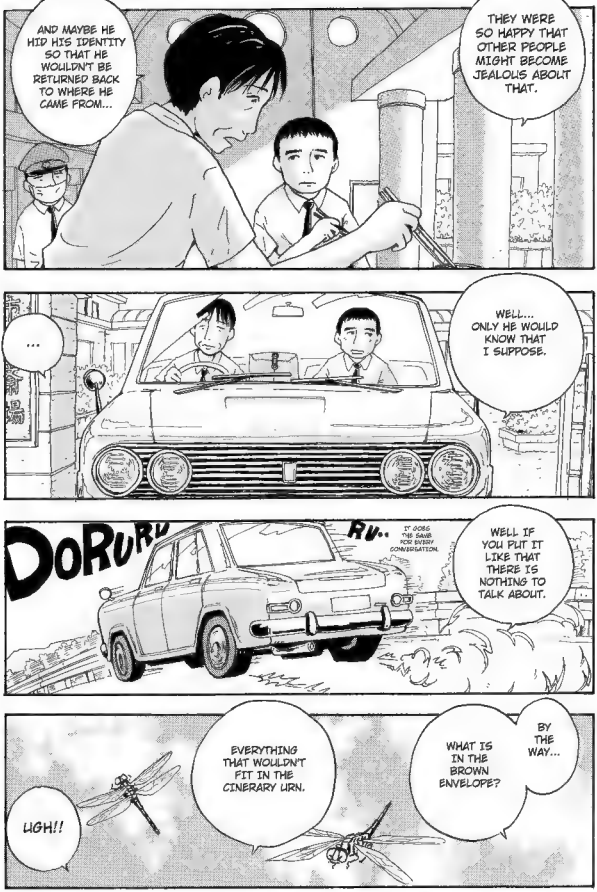
MY DOG HAD ALREADY TURNED TWELVE YEARS OLD.
YOU HAVE GOTTEN OLD TOO.
I GRADUATED COLLEGE AND FOUND A JOB.
IT'S ALREADY BEEN FOUR YEARS SINCE GRANDPA DIED.
AND WITH ME HEADING OFF TO WORK AND SUPPORT MYSELF...
HE STARTED AGING FASTER AND FASTER
AS IF HIS ROLE HAD FINALLY ENDED.
...
HE SPENT MOST OF EACH DAY LOST IN DREAMS...
IN THE FINAL FEW WEEKS HE BARELY EVEN HAD THE ENERGY TO EAT.
DOG'S FOOD

...
I WAS ALWAYS SCARED THAT HE HAD FALLEN ILL OR SOMETHING.
EVERY TIME I LOOKED INTO HIS DOGHOUSE.
...
HIS SIDES TIREDLY RISING AND FALLING.
HIS BREATHING WAS RAGGED.
EVEN WITHOUT ANY MEDICAL EXPERIENCE I COULD TELL HIS TIME WAS NEAR.
WHEEZ
WHEEZ
WHEEZ
ARE HIS SENSES GETTING MUDDLED ...?
WHAT'S THE MATTER?!
WHEEZ
WHEEZ
WHEEZ

AND FOR A SPLIT SECOND I SAW THE HAPPIEST EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE.
I TOSSED THE BALL AT HIS FEET.
HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE ENOUGH ENERGY TO PICK UP THE BALL AGAIN.
BUT...

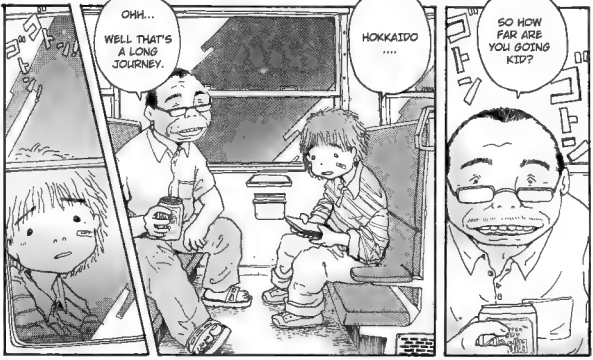
I SHOULD HAVE PLAYED WITH HIM MORE....
I...
WHAT DID I ACTUALLY DO FOR MY DOG?
I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN HIM FOR MORE WALKS.
I SHOULD HAVE...
SO HE COULD SNIFF THEM UNTIL HE WAS HAPPY.
I SHOULD HAVE LET HIM GO ALONG GUARD RAILS, CURBS AND TELEPHONE POLES WITHOUT PULLING HIM TOO MUCH.
GIVEN HIM MORE LOVE WITHOUT BEING SCARED...


YOSHIO MAEDA ENDED UP BEING A FAKE NAME, ALONG WITH HIS ADDRESS.
IT ENDED UP JUST BEING A WASTE OF TIME!!
HE'S JUST TREATED LIKE A JOHN DOE.
THAT'S WHY I SAID YOU SHOULD HAVE JUST SENT A LETTER.
HEY, YOSHIZAKI ...
THE END OF MAEDA'S LIFE...
DO YOU THINK IT WAS REALLY THAT UNHAPPY ...?
HUH!?


AND MAYBE HE HID HIS IDENTITY SO THAT HE WOULDN'T BE RETURNED BACK TO WHERE HE CAME FROM...
THEY WERE SO HAPPY THAT OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT BECOME JEALOUS ABOUT THAT.
...
WELL... ONLY HE WOULD KNOW THAT I SUPPOSE.
DORURU
RU..
IT GOES THE SAME FOR EVERY CONVERSATION.
WELL IF YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT.
UGH!!
EVERYTHING THAT WOULDN'T FIT IN THE CINERARY URN.
WHAT IS IN THE BROWN ENVELOPE?
BY THE WAY...

...
バッ!

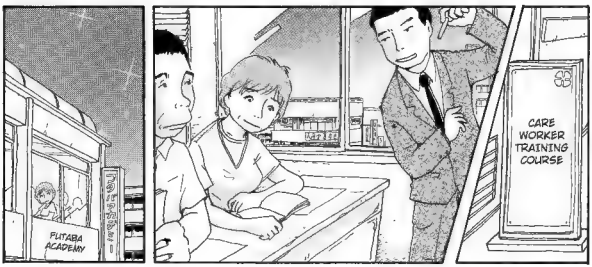
BUT YOU KEEP HOPING STILL...
NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU HOPE FOR IT, IT NEVER COMES TRUE...


OHH... WELL THAT'S A LONG JOURNEY.
HOKKAIDO ....
SO HOW FAR ARE YOU GOING KID?
ゴトン
ゴトン
ゴトン

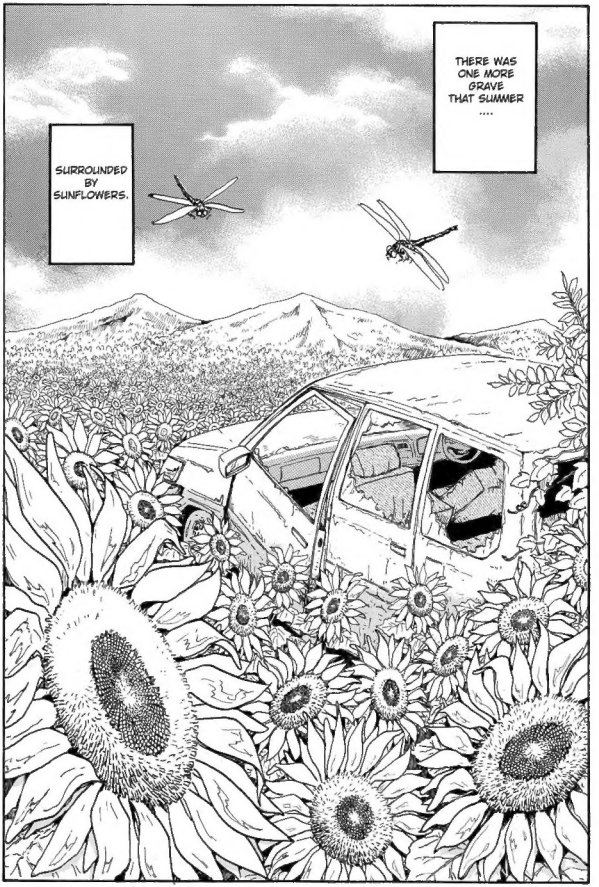
THAT IS ALL....

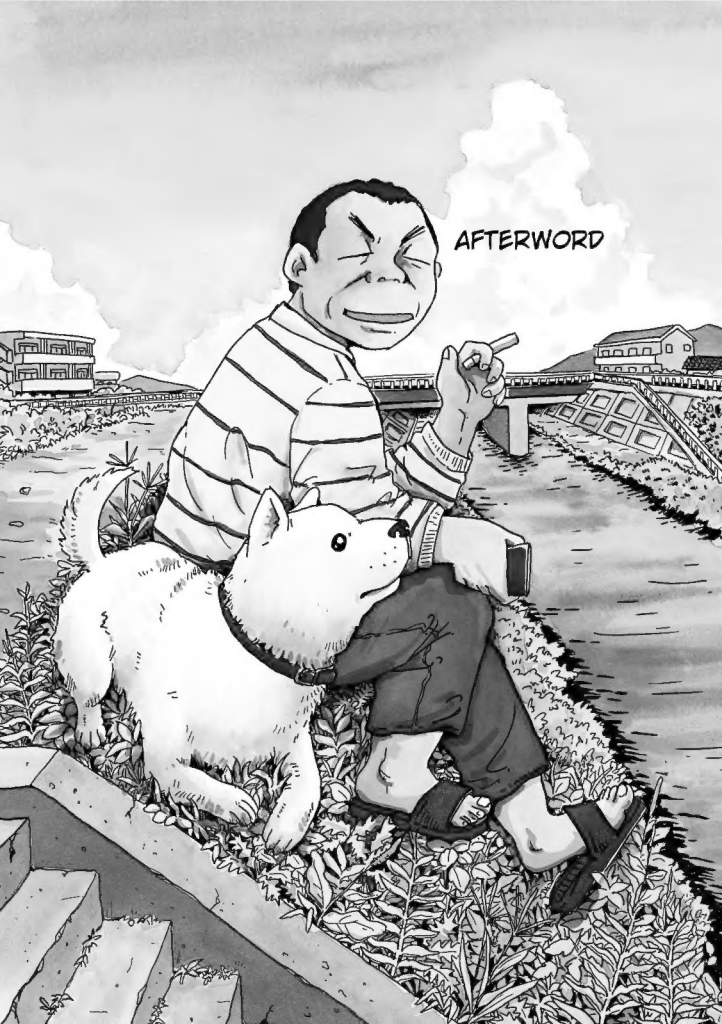
AS LONG AS THEY KEEP ON LIVING...

EVERY PERSON...



THEY ARE "STAR PROTECTOR DOGS".
FROM THE FOLLOWING YEAR...


THERE WAS ONE MORE GRAVE THAT SUMMER ....
SURROUNDED BY SUNFLOWERS.


AFTERWORD

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS MANGA. EVEN THOUGH I WROTE THIS MANGA MYSELF, I THOUGHT THAT THE "FATHER" WASN'T A BAD PERSON TO THE EXTENT THAT HE'D DESERVE TO MEET SUCH AN END. HE'S A BIT CLUMSY, BUT HE'S JUST A REALLY SERIOUS TYPE. HE'S NOT THE BEST PERSON YOU CAN EVER MEET IN YOUR LIFE, HE'S JUST TOO SERIOUS. A FATHER LIKE THIS, WHO DISLIKES – EVEN JUST A LITTLE – CHANGES THAT OCCUR IN HIS FAMILY OR IN SOCIETY, AND WHO TAKES ISSUE WITH CHANGING HIMSELF... IN THE PAST, THIS WAS CONSIDERED TO BE A TOTALLY AVERAGE FATHER. HOWEVER, NOWADAYS THESE THINGS MIGHT BECOME CAUSES FOR THE LOSS OF ONE'S "NORMAL LIFE", AND I THINK THIS SITUATION IS REALLY ANNOYING. I'M NOT TRYING TO DEFEND HIM, BUT FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME WHO CAN'T EVEN FULFIL HIS OWN DUTIES, I HONESTLY THINK THIS WORLD IS REALLY AWFUL TOWARDS PEOPLE WHO ARE JUST GIVING THE BEST IN THEIR LIVES, BUT END UP EXPERIENCING TERRIBLE THINGS.

I MANAGED TO ARRANGE AT LEAST A PLEASANT DRIVE BY THE SHORE AND A WONDERFUL "PARTNER" AS A FAREWELL GIFT FOR THE FATHER'S DEPARTURE. THIS DOG LOVES HIS MASTER SO MUCH, UNCONDITIONALLY AND WITHOUT AGENDA, IT ACTUALLY MAKES ME FEEL SORRY FOR IT. I CAN'T EVEN FATHOM HOW MUCH MY OWN DOG MUST HAVE SAVED ME, AS WELL.

A DOG BY ONE'S SIDE.
I'M SURE THOSE TOO MUST'VE BEEN HAPPY.
AND THAT'S A FACT.

THE "SUNFLOWER" IN THE SECOND PART OF THE MANGA IS A FUNERARY CHAPTER FOR THEM.
THE NAME "OKUTSU" IS DERIVED FROM THE WORD "OKUTSUGI", WHICH MEANS "TOMB" OR "HIDDEN HOUSE OF THE SOUL" IN JAPANESE.
NOW HE'S JUST A GRAVE KEEPER THAT FEELS DEEPLY LOST.
EVEN INSIDE OKUTSU, THE LOVE HE RECEIVED FROM THAT DOG IS SMOLDERING INSIDE, AND IT KEEPS ALIVE A SMALL LIGHT IN HIS HEART. I HOPE OKUTSU BUYS ANOTHER DOG.

FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MR. KANO FROM FUTABASHA FROM BOTTOM OF MY HEART, FOR SUGGESTING THAT I TRY WRITING A STORY - ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER WRITTEN ONE BEFORE – AND FOR THINKING UP THE PERFECT TITLE FOR IT. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK ALL THE PEOPLE THAT SUPPORTED ME WHEN WE PUBLISHED THE MANGA. I WANTED TO USE THIS SPACE TO THANK ALL OF YOU.
I REALLY APPRECIATED YOUR SUPPORT.
THANKS TO ALL MY FRIENDS AND TO MY FAMILY.
I'M A STAR PROTECTOR DOG TOO.

SUMMER 2009

TAKASHI MURAKAMI